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ABSTRACT

The question of whether a significant amount of time could be saved if freshman composition were taught with a programed text was studied. Two sections of English I were randomly selected from the regular class schedule. Class A was taught using the usual syllabus and texts. Class B was taught using the same syllabus and texts with one exception. In Class A, the rhetoric text used was "Modern English Handbook" (MEH), whereas in Class B the rhetoric text used was "Programmed College Composition" (PCC). Both classes were conducted in the same manner except for the approach used in teaching writing. The PCC demanded that the student write more than did the MEH. Since the PCC text required many written assignments, more time was required of the instructor in reading written assignments and analyzing them in class. The PCC also required more time for class participation on the part of the instructor as he had to independently work out the exercises. The PCC text required more time on the part of the instructor and the student, and thus did not prove to be a work saver. (CK)

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Research Report

A FEASIBILITY STUDY TO DETERMINE THE POSSIBILITY OF TEACHING FRESHMAN COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC WITH A PROGRAMMED TEXT

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Cooperative Research

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Introduction

With the growing numbers of freshman students on this as well as other college campuses, there is an increasing concern about the present method of teaching composition in freshman English courses. Normally, a freshman English class is composed of 25 students and an instructor. But this number of students is considered large and burdensome for an instructor. The University of North Carolina, for example, limits enrollment in freshman English classes to 16 students. By keeping the number of students in the class low, the instructor has enough time to properly read and grade all the writing the students are required to do over the semester. Since the only way to learn how to write is to write, the instructor of freshman English must of necessity assign and read large amounts of student writing. The student, then, receives a corrective feedback from the instructor and can incorporate the corrections and suggestions for improvement into his writing. This interaction between instructor and student is the heart of freshman English as it is presently taught not only on the Stevens Point campus, but on campuses across the United States. The main problem, then, in any restructuring of freshman English is how to keep the necessary interaction between the instructor and the student while at the same time enlarging the number of students an instructor can properly and adequately handle.

Since programmed learning allows a student to proceed at his own rate while receiving immediate corrective feedback, it would seem that a programmed text could be used to teach composition. The instructor would then be free to deal with students individually, but he would not have to be as detailed in his criticisms of each student's individual written assignment since the programmed text would provide the student with many of the corrections he needed. Programmed composition texts would then seem to offer the possibility of one instructor teaching a relatively large number of students.

But a study to properly investigate a programmed approach to teaching freshman composition would have to be carefully constructed. It seemed to me that before such a complex study should be undertaken a more limited study should be made. The first question that occurs is whether teaching freshman composition with a programmed text will reduce the number of hours an instructor must spend teaching the course. That is, will the use of a programmed text significantly reduce the time spent reading and grading papers by an instructor? If a significant time reduction can be achieved, then the instructor could teach more students without increasing his present work load. It should be made quite clear at this point that this study does not take into account the effectiveness of a programmed text in teaching composition. This study was undertaken simply

to determine whether a significant amount of time could be saved if composition were taught with a programmed text. If there was a significant amount of time saved, then a larger, more comprehensive study could be undertaken to determine whether an instructor could teach more students per section if a programmed text were used. The present study, then, is very limited in scope. It was undertaken to simply determine the number of teacher hours required to teach one section of freshman English in the present, conventional manner, and the number of hours required to teach one section of freshman English using a programmed text. The result of this study presents simply a raw figure for the comparative number of instructor hours. The study does not attempt to evalute the effectiveness of either approach to teaching freshman English.

Methods

Two sections of English I were randomly selected from the regular class schedule. Class A was taught using the usual syllabus and texts. Class B was taught using the same syllabus and the same texts with one exception. In Class A the rhetoric text used was Modern English Handbook (hereafter referred to as MEH) whereas in Class B the rhetoric text used was Programmed College Composition (hereafter referred to as PCC) (see Appendix 2). Both classes were conducted in the same manner except for the approach used in teaching writing. The same number of themes were assigned in both courses. The reading assignments were dictated by the texts. For example, the PCC demanded that the student write more than did the MEH. Whereas the MEH would discuss the rhetorical principles and then point out possible applications, PCC would discuss the principles and then require, as an integral part of the discussion, that the student apply these principles in a specific writing assignment. These assignments would vary in length from a sentence to a full theme. Thus the texts themselves dictated the approach and direction of the writing assignments in the course. And at all times the texts were followed.

Findings and Analysis

Appendix I lists the comparative number of instructor hours required in each class. Class A (standard) required 174.4 hours (10,464 minutes) while class B (experimental) required 216.5 (12,990 minutes). In comparison with the standard class, the experimental class required 24.1% more instructor time. Since the PCC text required the student to do more writing, more time was needed for the instructor to at least read these assignments. This became the strongest and weakest point of the programmed approach.

The programmed text relied on many written assignments, some quite brief, others quite extended. Although the text provided sample answers against which the student could compare his own work, the students found this unsatisfactry.

While a certain amount of corrective feedback was attainable by having the student compare his work and the sample answer in the text, most students were not content with this approach. Instead they would compare their work and the sample answer and then want the instructor to read their work and comment on it. The class opinion was that each student writing assignment should at least be read by the instructor, if not commented on and graded since each student felt his writing style and approach was unique. The instructor also found this to be true. Many times a student's approach was innovative and did not conform in any way with the approach suggested by the text. Thus the student felt he had a right to be judged separately from the suggested answer. The instructor felt that this was reasonable. Moreover, the instructor felt that if the students relied on the suggested answers too much, a certain mechanical style and approach tended to develop in the students' writing. And, since the PCC text required many written assignments, more time was required of the instructor in reading written assignments and analyzing them in class.

The PCC also required more time for class participation on the part of the instructor. Since the answers provided in the text were only suggestions, it became necessary for the instructor to independently work out the exercises in order to better understand the assignment and the problems it presented. This was not true with the MEH. The MEH provided a teacher's manual with explanations and answers for all exercises. The PCC provided only answers, with no rationale for these answers. At times, the instructor would work the exercises and find himself in disagreement with the answers. Thus, more time was needed to work out and provide a clear presentation of the exercises and answers for the class.

The PCC text required more time on the part of both the instructor and the student. Thus, it did not prove to be a work saver. Although it effectively taught writing, it did so by demanding more time of instructor and student. At the end of the semester, both the instructor and the students independently decided that such a text should be used in a smaller class of perhaps 10 to 12 students where there could be close instructor student contact.

Conclusions

Since this study was undertaken simply to discover the number of hours required to teach freshman English with a programmed text compared to the number of hours required to teach the course in the conventional manner, the conclusion of this report is best summed up in Appendix I. There the figures point out that it requires more time to use the programmed text than the conventional text. This study, of course, has nothing to report about the comparative effectiveness of the two approaches. Moreover, this study indicates that it would not be fruitful to undertake a full scale study of the use of programmed texts in freshman

English, if the hope of such a study was to prove that the use of programmed materials would increase the number of students that could be handled in one class. It seems, therefore, that a programmed text works not to lower an instructor's load but to increase it by demanding more of his time. Moreover, a programmed text does not seem to allow for larger classes but smaller.

Appendix I

Instructor Time Expenditure

	Class A (Standard)	Class B (Experimental)
1. Number of themes	8	8
2. Number of exercises	0	0
3. Number of examinations	1	1
4. Minutes required for grading		
a. Themes	12	12
b. Exercises	0	5
c. Examinations	15	15
5. Minutes for administering examinstions	120	120
6. Number of preparations		
a. Themes	8	8
b. Exercises	0	12
c. Examinations	1	1
d. Class periods	52	52
7. Minutes of preparation		
a. Themes	15	0
b. Exercises	0	30
c. Examinations	30	30
d. Class periods	100	120
8. Number of class periods	52	52
9. Minutes per class period	50	50
10. Number of students	19	20
11. Number of student conferences	19	20
12. Minutes per student conference	15	15
13. Total instructor time required in minutes (See formula below)	10,464	12,990
14. Total time per student (See formula below)	550.73	649.5

13. = 10 [(1)(4a) + (2)(4b) + (3) (4c)] + 5 + (6a)(7a) + (6b) (7b) + (6c))7c) + (6d)(7a) + (8)(9) + (11)(12)

14. = 13/10

13/60 = total hours required

Appendix 2

Texts

Class A

Modern English Handbook by Robert Gorrell and Charlton Laird (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1967)

An Approach to Literature ed. by Cleanth Brooks, John Purser, and Robert Penn Warren (New York, 1967)

Writing Prose, ed. by Thomas Kane and Leoard Peters (New York, 1964)

Great American Essays ed. by Norman Cousins (New York, 1968)

Catch-22 by Joseph Heller (New York, 1963)

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad (New York, 1963)

Appendix 2
(cont.)

Texts

Class B

Programmed College Composition by Marilyn Bender Ferster (New York, 1965)

An Approach to Literature ed. by Cleanth Brooks, John Purser, and Robert Penn Warren (New York, 1967)

Writing Prose ed. by Thomas Kane and Leonard Peters (New York, 1964)

Great American Essays ed. by Norman Cousins (New York, 1968)

Catch-22 by Joseph Heller (New York, 1963)

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad (New York, 1963)

A Feasibility Study to Determine the Possibility of Teaching Freshman Composition and Rhetoric With a Programmed Text

Summary of Report

William D. Lutz

The object of this study was limited to determining whether the use of a programmed text would significantly reduce the number of instructor hours required to teach the freshman composition and rhetoric course. The study did not take into account the effectiveness of a programmed text in teaching composition. The results of this study simply present the number of hours required to teach one section of freshman English with conventional texts and one section with a programmed text.

Two sections of freshman English were randomly selected from the regular class schedule. After one semester of teaching one course with the regular texts and one with the programmed text, it was determined that the course taught using the programmed text required 24.1% time of the instructor. The regular course required 174.4 hours while the programmed course required 216.5 hours. These figures indicate that it required more time to teach the course with the programmed text than it required to teach the course with the conventional texts.